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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken in 1979-80 to determine whether or not a consistent career pattern existed among women currently serving in senior-level administrative positions in higher education. Forty-four women in 41 institutions in 26 states were represented. Five were senior executive officers, and 39 were senior officers reporting directly to an executive officer. Tape recorded interviews were held in the women's home offices. The career patterns varied, the only generic stage for all being college attendance in late teens and early twenties. After this period, the women engaged in furthering their education (11), homemaking (5), and working (5 in higher education, 14 in elementary/secondary education, 9 in careers outside). In the first group, doctorates were earned between 25 and 32 and most women were immediately employed in higher education. The five early homemakers did this for from 4 to 23 years. Of these, one's first paid employment was as an institutional vice president. Only two of these five had obtained terminal degrees, at 37 and 45. Some of the women working immediately after college did take time off for homemaking, but otherwise the career patterns varied greatly, in administration, teaching, and other jobs. Women having moved to presidential positions had all begun in some area of education. Most of the academic vice presidents were from student services or elementary/secondary education backgrounds; other vice presidents came from other backgrounds. It appears that no prior career experience is a prerequisite for a woman becoming a senior-level administrator in state-supported higher education institutions. Middle-level administrative experience is the stage most often seen here, followed by studying for a terminal degree. Breaks for homemaking do not appear to have hampered these women. Higher level opportunities, however, do seem to be improved if early careers are in some area of education. (MSE)

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SENIOR-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION:

HOW DO WOMEN PREPARE?

"Changing the facial expressions of higher education is about as difficult as coaxing a smile out of the Great Sphinx of Egypt" (Wasden, 1979). The reputation which this comment reflects is well deserved if one measure of change is the influx of women into senior-level administrative positions, because the number of such women is extremely limited. Yet, during the past two decades the socio-economic and demographic changes in the role of American women have been dramatic.

American women are experiencing a transitional era that should provide them with remarkable career opportunities representing dramatic changes from their past. The change that is occurring is reflected in federal legislation of the 1960's and 1970's ensuring women the opportunity to pursue the education and training necessary for developing an orientation towards lifelong careers. Student is no longer synonymous with adolescent or young adult, and even mature women are returning to school for credentials. In addition, contemporary society increasingly is accepting nontraditional living arrangements. Lifelong singleness, smaller families, child-free families, separate households, and female-headed households are becoming a reality in American society. Strong economic pressures are also becoming a major factor. Such pressures are forcing many families to depend on two incomes; thus, the wife/mother and the career woman are often identical (Myers, 1979).

Although the percentages are decreasing, American women are still preferring careers in the traditionally female fields, and education

is one of their desired choices. The number of women receiving doctorates in education in 1961-62 was 359; this number rose to 1,355 in 1970-71 (U.S. Department of Labor, 1975). In order for higher education to absorb its share of this large increase in college-educated women, a movement of more of these women into the traditionally male-dominated administrative positions seems essential; yet, published data in 1977 revealed that education, traditionally a female profession, was still being ruled by men (Grambs, 1977). In 1975 Peggy Elder (1975) suggested that women were little closer to being full participants in the complete process of higher education than they had been a century ago.

In 1977 Astin (1977) found that only one percent of all presidents of public four-year colleges and private and public universities were women. Astin also found women to be grossly underrepresented as chief academic officers and as deans of colleges of arts and sciences--positions from which he reported presidents to be most frequently selected. Using the proportion of women on university faculties as a guide, women in these three top positions were reported as underrepresented by more than fifteen to one.

This absence of representative numbers of women in higher education at the administrative ranks was not entirely due to the discriminatory policies and practices of colleges and universities (Elder, 1975), although Astin (1977) found discriminatory policies and practices to still be a problem in 1977. Astin also discovered that many talented women did not expend the same effort for job advancements as had their male colleagues.

Study

In 1979-80, with partial funding from the National Institute of Education a study was conducted to determine if a consistent career

pattern existed among the women currently serving in senior-level administrative positions of higher education. Women in four-year, coeducational, state supported institutions were invited to participate, and 92% (44 of 48) accepted. Forty-one institutions in 26 different states were represented.

Of the 44 participants, 5 were senior-executive officers at institutions, and 39 were senior officers reporting directly to an executive officer. Tape recorded interviews were held in home offices of the women. A content analysis was conducted in which interview topics were grouped, tabulated, and summarized.

Findings

The career paths followed by the women to reach their senior-level administrative positions varied. The only generic stage for all women was their college attendance during their late teens and/or early 20's.

After leaving this first period in college, the women participated in three basic life-style settings which were (a) furthering their education, (b) homemaking, and (c) working. Eleven women furthered their education which was life-style one, and five women selected a homemaking life-style. In the third category of working, 5 careers were in higher education, 14 were in elementary/secondary education, and 9 were in careers other than education, as is shown in Table 1.

Insert Table 1 About Here

Students. Eleven women who continued in school until obtaining doctorates completed their degrees between the ages of 25 and 32. Ten

women in the student category were immediately employed in higher education, nine as teachers, one as an administrator. The other woman worked in a job other than education and was then employed in higher education to teach. Nine of the teachers served in some type of administrative position prior to accepting senior-level positions. One woman left a middle-level administrative position for two years to take a job other than education immediately prior to accepting her senior-level post. Three women in this category had interrupted their careers for 3 to 10 years of homemaking.

Homemakers. Five women began as homemakers and lived this life-style from 4 to 23 years. The latter woman's first paid employment was her position as a vice president in higher education. Another homemaker's experience was limited to jobs other than education prior to her senior-level position. The remaining three homemakers all had experience teaching in elementary/secondary education and in higher education, and two of these women had also acquired administrative experience in higher education prior to their senior-level posts. Only two women in the homemaker category had obtained terminal degrees, doing so at ages 37 and 45.

Higher Education. Five women's first employment was in higher education, three as teachers and two as administrators. Four women in the higher education category obtained terminal degrees between ages 28 and 41. Of the three teachers, one left education for a period of employment in a job other than education. One left for employment in elementary/secondary education, and one left for a period of homemaking. Upon their return to higher education, all three had experience in teaching and administration before their senior-level positions. The two women who began as administrators in higher education continued in similar

types of roles until the senior-level position, although one did take a brief break for homemaking.

Elementary/Secondary. Fourteen senior-level administrative women began working in elementary/secondary education. Two of these women eventually served in an administrative role at the elementary level prior to moving to higher education. Twelve women in this category obtained terminal degrees between the ages of 27 and 48. Four women in this category had experience in jobs other than education, and four had career breaks for homemaking. Of the 14 women in the elementary/secondary category, 9 had experience in higher education as both teachers and administrators, 4 had administrative experience and 1 had teaching experience. Women in this category had from 3 to 11 different jobs in their career stages.

Job Other than Education. Nine women in this study were first employed in jobs other than education. Six of the nine women obtained terminal degrees between the ages of 29 and 52. All women in this category acquired administrative experience in higher education prior to the senior-level position, and four had teaching experience. Three women had career intermissions for homemaking. The only woman to return to school as a student after accepting a senior-level position was in this category, as was the only woman to accept a senior-level position immediately upon completion of a terminal degree.

As Table 2 indicates, no one career stage was reported by all 44 women in this study prior to becoming senior-level administrators. While 39 had been higher education middle-level administrators, 5 women had no previous administrative experience in higher education. Of the 44 women, only 29 had taught in higher education. Thirty-four women had been full-time students or had made acquiring education their primary

vocation at some point in their careers. Eighteen women had been previously employed in elementary/secondary education, and 18 had been employed in jobs other than education. Career breaks for homemaking were experienced by 17 women.

Insert Table 2 About Here

The five women who did not have prior experience in higher education administration were three in the homemaker category and two in the elementary/secondary education category. While 34 women made acquiring education a primary vocation during their careers, 35 women actually completed terminal degrees. The latter woman did so by attending on an irregular basis for an extended period of time. The 17 women who interrupted their careers for periods of homemaking represented 77% of the married women having children.

The shortest period of time for full-time involvement as a student by any woman was two years. The shortest period any woman spent in all other stages was one year. The longest length of time for a woman in each different career was (a) higher education administration, 34 years; (b) higher education teaching, 25 years; (c) student, 11 years; (d) elementary/secondary education, 20 years; (e) jobs other than education, 18 years; and (6) homemaking, 23 years.

Administrative Position by Life-Style Classification

As Table 3 indicates, women who egressed to presidential positions had all begun in some area of education: students, higher education, and elementary/secondary education. While vice presidents for academics

began in all life-style categories, most were from the student and elementary/secondary categories. Both vice presidents for administrative affairs came from the job other than education category, and both vice presidents for development came from the homemaker category. The vice president for fiscal affairs began in the student category; the vice president for institutional affairs, in the elementary/secondary category; and the vice president for public relations, in the homemaker category. Of the women who currently served as vice presidents for student affairs none had begun as students but they were represented by all other life-style categories, with ½ being from the elementary/secondary category.

Insert Table 3 About Here

Discussion

From the findings in this study, it would appear that no prior career experience is a prerequisite for a woman becoming a senior-level administrator in state supported institutions of higher education. Middle-level administrative experience is the stage most frequently seen, followed by studying for a terminal degree. The much debated issue of women's career breaks for homemaking appears to have not hampered the career advancement of women in this study. Women's opportunities for becoming presidents and vice presidents for academics, fiscal affairs, institutional research and student affairs seem to be improved if early careers are established in some area of education.

Table 1

Setting Following First College Attendance

Setting			Number	Percent
Students			11	25
Homemakers			5	11
Employed:	Higher education	5		
	Elementary/Secondary	14		
	Other	9	28	64
Total			44	100

Table 2

Number of Women by Career Stages

Career Stage	Number of Women	Percent of Women
Higher education administrator	39	89
Higher education teacher	29	66
Student acquiring education	34	77
Elementary/Secondary educator	18	41
Homemaker	17	39

Table 3

Present Position Obtained by Life-Style Classification

Present Position	Life-Style					
	Student	Homemaker	Higher Education	Elementary/ Secondary Education	Job Other Than Education	Total
President	2		1	2		5
Vice president for academics	8	1	2	5	4	20
Vice president for administrative affairs					2	2
Vice president for development		2				2
Vice president for fiscal affairs	1					1
Vice president for institutional research				1		1
Vice president for public relations		1				1
Vice president for student affairs		1	2	6	3	12

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Abstract

The roles of American women are rapidly changing. Women now comprise nearly 40% of the labor force and of college enrollments. The guidelines for women who want to pursue careers in the teaching profession are clearly defined in college catalogs; however, no clear definition exists for suggesting what career experiences contribute to a woman's progression to an administrative role. In an attempt to determine if a consistent career pattern existed for women serving in senior-level administrative positions in higher education, interviews were conducted with such women, comparing their career experiences.

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